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Gilles Kepel. *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom: The Future of the Middle East*. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008. Paperback \$27.95, pp. 336. ISBN: 9780674031388, Reviewed by Scott Nicholas Romaniuk , University of Aberdeen , Aberdeen, United Kingdom

Gilles Kepel, French analyst of the Muslim world, and one of the foremost experts on political Islam, delivers a detailed analysis of divergent strategies and objectives within the contemporary war on terror. His critique of the subject matter is based on two “grand narratives” – President George W. Bush’s “global war on terror” and Al Qaeda’s murderous *jihād*. The Bush administration’s war against the “axis of evil” was a deliberate reprise of the Regan administration’s struggle against the Soviet “evil empire” implemented in 1983. However, as Kepel demonstrates with stunning precision, “in formulating this analogy between the war on terror and the Cold War, the Bush administration ignored several fundamental differences between the former Eastern bloc and the Middle East” (p. 4).

The general portrayal of Al Qaeda operations rarely tells the story of opposition to the most comprehensive campaign against global terror. Kepel reasons that, in challenging President Bush’s war on terror, “Bin Laden and his followers sought to perpetuate the strategy of ‘martyrdom operations’ that had shocked the world on 9/11” (p. 5), and that Bin Laden’s followers would “accomplish their aims through voluntary death in combat, in a sublime, phantasmagorical act of self-sacrifice on the part of believers” (p. 5). Transcending the grand narratives presented within this work, Kepel argues that *jihādism* was an abortive attempt to coalesce the forces of global Islam. Based primarily on secondary sources, this book provides a framework with which political officials and many within the analytic community might further understand America’s war on terror as an articulation of the very policy objectives put into practice by the United States in the Middle East since the end of the Second World War.

Comprised of six chapters, Kepel begins with an evaluative approach of United States operations in the Middle East, and what was expected to be a “new American century” (p. 1). Chapter two synthesizes martyrdom operations among Shiite Islamists, Sunnis, and “Third Worldists” while drawing parallels between earlier crises and America’s debacle in Iraq. It addresses Ahmadinejad’s use of Quranic parlance to depict the violent writhe between “oppressors and oppressed” (p. 64). Chapter three explores Islamist resistance following the American occupation of Iraq. It underscores the growing “base of *jihād*” and allegiance to Bin Laden’s malicious campaigns launched against New York, Madrid, and London, as well as those in Iraq and

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Afghanistan. Chapters four and five examine Al Qaeda's vehement action in Europe, the global Islamic resistance, and international opposition to the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. In doing so, Kepel asserts that, "if the grand narrative of the war on terror saw the proliferation of *jihād* as leading Europe's decline, its mirror image – the grand narrative of *jihād* through martyrdom – also saw Europe as decadent, but in a difference way" (p. 175). Chapter six considers forces that underpinned neo-conservative ideology during the Bush era, the transformation of the United States' role, and Europe's part in the growing crisis in the Middle East. It exemplifies the growing multi-polarity in an increasingly complex global corridor, and poses the argument that the United States "has no choice but to abandon ideology and go back to politics" (p. 278).

One of the major strengths of this book is the linkage established between a mutual failure on both sides to formulate enduring democracy on one side and Islamic unity on the other. Operating in a very familiar environment of scholarly inquiry, Kepel remarkably weaves together cultural perspectives, the dynamic forces of religion and fundamental extremism, and the practice of political strategy regionally and internationally.

The principle gap in this book is evident through its lack of focus on other democratic and Islamic nation's occupations and motivations in the global war on terror and the subsequent response to it. As a consequence, identifying the fundamental changes taking place elsewhere political, socially, and culturally, is evident. Kepel equally does not discuss how the practice of other players, such as state actors and international organizations integrate with other forms of determination and potential resolution on practical levels.

These shortcomings aside, *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom* represents a valuable contribution to the literature of political science and international affairs, and will serve as a vital tool for analytical inquiry by academics and students. Far from dictating the need to follow the paths of X, Y, and Z, Kepel's provocative reflection serves as a critical calling for policymakers to assume a more realistic approach and constructive policy platform for engaging with issues that plague an exceedingly volatile region and uncertain time.

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